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ABSTRACT

In response to student inclination toward professional skill-oriented majors, the department of speech communication at Ohio University has developed an undergraduate program which offers professional undergraduate training specifically oriented to other than teaching careers. The four objectives of this program are to prepare the student to display a broad-based conceptual understanding of communication as event and as process, to demonstrate proficiency in ordinary skills, to apply effectively both theory and skills in organizational settings, and to demonstrate a conceptual understanding of at least two fields of study other than organizational communication. A typical curriculum which meets these objectives is aimed specifically for the student seeking an entry level position in corporate management. (The curriculum outline in worksheet format is included.) (JM)

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FITTING THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM TO THE NEEDS OF BUSINESS

Robert S. Goyer and William F. Eadie

Ohio University

The half-decade of the Seventies has thus far visited upon the nation's institutions of higher education a period of massive retrenchment and re-evaluation. Gone are the halcyon days when seemingly unlimited numbers of 18-22 year-olds jammed the capacity of all available colleges and universities, bringing with them not only their social and political concerns but also their dollars, which allowed undergraduate education to expand its programs to meet the demands imposed by those social and political concerns. As the pool of college-going individuals declined, those who remained have tended to align themselves away from the traditional liberal arts curricula, and toward professional skill-oriented majors. Schools and departments with "lesser" reputations in these vocation-directed areas have suffered the greatest loss of enrollment during this retrenchment. To compensate, many universities are attempting to attract new students through a heavy emphasis on "career education."

The results of this emphasis for traditional departments of speech communication have been variable. Although many such departments have long offered undergraduate career training in the area of "speech education," prior to 1964, when Ohio University first offered an undergraduate major in Organizational Communication, no other school that we have been able to identify offered any professional undergraduate training specifically oriented to other than teaching careers. Since that time, and largely in response to the job market and society's needs, many of the traditional

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speech departments have changed not only their complexions, but their names as well.

It is of some interest to note that, although the total main campus enrollment at our university dropped (as did many others) during the period 1970-75, enrollments in the Organizational Communication major have continued to rise rather dramatically during that period, which we interpret as evidence of the marketability of undergraduates trained in this major.

To the extent that it might prove helpful, we propose to share our experiences with the Organizational Communication major for those of you who might wish to realign your offerings to better fit the career-oriented needs of students with particular interests in business/industry. Our discussion will be in two parts: in the first, we shall outline what we feel to be the basic objectives of such a program under the aegis of departments of speech communication; in the second, we shall present model curricula for those departments who wish to establish undergraduate programs in organizational communication, as well as for those departments who wish to alter their programs toward a business-oriented focus without major modification in present course offerings.

Two restrictions will be placed upon these musings. First, we shall limit ourselves to a discussion of undergraduate curricula in organizational communication. Several graduate programs in this field already exist, and their curricula can serve as models for those who might wish to expand into the area. Moreover, it seems to us that the needs of undergraduates are vastly different from those of graduate students. Undergraduate training in organizational communication provides neither the perspective nor the degree of specialization attendant to graduate study;

we can, however, offer these students a solid theoretical and practical framework in communication that can be applied to whatever occupations they choose to pursue. Second, we shall be guided by experience, but we shall not limit ourselves to that experience. Thus, some of our recommendations will be based on what is already happening at our institution, while others will reflect more of what we would like to see happen, than what we perceive as current reality. With these constraints in mind, let us turn to the program's objectives.

Objectives

First of all, it's important to understand that the term "organizational communication" is not to be interpreted as synonomous with "business and industrial communication." We view business and industry simply as one of many possible organizational job settings (albeit a large one) and advise our students accordingly. The point is that required courses in the major should be equally appropriate in any organizational setting. In accordance with this definition then, we feel that after completing the program of study, the student should be able to:

(1.) Display a broad-based conceptual understanding of communication as event and as process.

(2.) Demonstrate proficiency in ordinary communicative skills.

(3.) Apply effectively both theory and skills in organizational settings.

(4.) Demonstrate a conceptual understanding of at least two fields of study other than organizational communication. It is in these so-called "minor" areas that the student aiming for a career in business/industry can subspecialize.

Stating each of the objectives is relatively simple; achieving the

objectives is considerably more difficult. In the following paragraphs, we shall consider each objective individually with regard to how it might best be realized.

The student should be able to display a broad-based conceptual understanding of communication as event and process. A career-oriented curriculum need not be exclusively "nuts and bolts" in its make-up. It would be virtually impossible, in fact, to provide the student with a set of prescriptions for operation (and here we use the word in its mechanical sense) in any given situation that he or she might encounter. While conceptual understanding might well be derived from practical experience, there is no substitute for theoretical grounding in providing individuals with the knowledge necessary to cope with the often complex communicational situations that are encountered daily.

In our opinion, this theoretical grounding should be at once diverse yet cohesive. It should be diverse in that the student should be exposed to a variety of theoretical positions and traditions that lend themselves to an understanding of communication, particularly with regard to human beings. At the same time, however, the student should be afforded a means for synthesizing the various theoretical perspectives and for constructing a conceptual framework subject to validation or modification through experience. In this sense, the student's grounding is focused, but not unidirectional.

At Ohio University, our foundational theory offering is a junior-level course entitled, "Introduction to the Communication Process." The primary objective of this course is to expose the student to the interdisciplinary nature of theory and research in the field of communication,

with particular emphasis on the contributions of various fields of study to an understanding of communicative processes. Organizational Communication majors are also required to complete theoretically-oriented courses in persuasion and organizational communication, and they are encouraged to explore in greater depth various theoretical positions through elective courses both in our department and other departments.

The student should be able to demonstrate proficiency in ordinary communicative skills. We define "ordinary communicative skills" as being those (particularly speaking, writing and listening) which lend themselves to effective oral and written interaction. Although we feel that a certain level of adequacy with these skills is prerequisite for the attainment of any college degree, graduates from a curriculum carrying a "communication" label should be able to interact with others in more than just an "adequate" manner. In our view, to be truly effective, the student needs to learn the people-oriented qualities involved in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. In other words, it is important to develop an interaction orientation.

We see two means by which an interaction orientation can be developed. The first is achieved through exposing the student to a wide range of communicative contexts, allowing for interaction to occur, and providing constructive feedback as to how performance can be improved. The second involved training the student to observe the intricacies of communicative processes in numerous contexts, allowing that student to develop a repertoire of communicative strategies that can be adapted for later use in similar situations. The effectiveness of either approach will be a function of the abilities of both the students and the faculty within a given program.

In our undergraduate organizational communication curriculum, instruction aimed at improving both oral and written skills is included. Majors must take courses in public speaking, group discussion, parliamentary procedure, interviewing, and campaign communication, as well as an advanced course in either composition or business writing. In addition, students can elect such courses as listening, argumentation and debate, and oral interpretation to fulfill unlisted hour requirements for the major. Furthermore, we are now considering adding a writing proficiency examination requirement to better identify students who need remedial assistance and to encourage them to seek such assistance.

The student should be able to apply effectively both theory and skills in organizational settings. To this point, we have not been describing objectives which are particularly unique to an organizational communication major. Undoubtedly, most undergraduate programs in speech communication have conceptual understandings and skill proficiency as goals of their curricula. The final two objectives, however, provide what we feel is the "character" that distinguishes organizational communication programs from curricula in traditional speech communication departments. In terms of the present objective, that character can be expressed as lying in opportunities for students to engage in cooperative education, internships, and special projects.

Cooperative education is an idea which has been tried extensively in the engineering and technical fields but which is relatively untried in the social and behavioral science fields. Essentially, this form of training allows the student to alternate between periods of classroom work and periods of field or job experience. Although a longer period of time may be needed to complece the degree (usually, five years instead of four), the added ex-

perience often makes co-op students more readily employable than those who simply complete the coursework.

Internships differ from cooperative education in that they generally are conducted on a one-shot basis for a specified period of time. During the internship, the student gains practical experience in his or her chosen profession or in a job which is related to an area of specialization or interest. Internships may be on a paid or unpaid basis, and they are often taken for course credit (in which case, a final report on the experience is required for evaluative purposes).

Special projects are theleast complicated of the three. Usually, they are completed while a student is regularly enrolled, and the project becomes a portion of that student's course load for the term in which it is being undertaken. The course's requirements stipulate that the student: (1) select a problem, the solution to which requires an application of both concepts and skills that have already been learned, (2) prepare a design for solving the problem, (3) execute the design, and (4) submit a report on the results. The project is intended to have particular relevance to the student's career goals.

We do not offer cooperative education to organizational communication students at Ohio University (though we would like to do so). We do, however, allow students to earn up to one full term's credit for an internship experience, and we require each of our Organizational Communication majors to complete both a course on research methods and at least one special project (typically during the senior year)before graduation. Although these projects sometimes place a heavy advising burden upon the faculty (they are counted as independent study and are carried above and beyond each instructor's regular course load), we have found that the special project can be the most

exciting course in the curriculum when it is employed in a creative manner.

The student should be able to demonstrate a conceptual understanding of at least two fields of study other than organizational communication. In addition to an understanding of the concepts and skills of human communicative processes, we require the student to develop expertise in other fields of study pertinent to the student's career goals. In many cases, the opportunity to study in other areas leads to the acquiring of a specialized skill (e.g., computer programming, accounting, counseling, etc.). In others, it leads to a greater understanding of the theoretical constructs in the particular subject matter area. For students interested in careers in business/industry, these "minor" requirements can provide significant educational opportunities. Further, by identifying the student's interests and by aiding the student in setting goals, the faculty advisor can direct the student into minor areas which will best be employed in meeting those goals.

Organizational Communication majors at Ohio University who plan on careers in business/industry typically select combinations of courses from departments in the College of Business Administration for at least one, and sometimes both, or their minors. These departments include Accounting, Economics, Administrative Sciences (including Business Administration, Marketing and Finance), and Organizational Science (Management). Other popular minor areas for students aiming for jobs in business/industry include one or a combination of the following: Sociology, Psychology, Journalism, Public Relations, and Guidance and Couseling. There is virtually no restriction on what conbination of courses a student may select for a minor, beyond the requirement that it must have a rationale consistent with the student's abilities and career goals.

In summary, we feel that a speech communication program that articulates with the specific needs of business/industrial organizations must first of all

adapt its faculty attitudes and expertise, as well as its curriculum, to meet the objectives described above.

For the remainder of this paper, we will recommend a typical curriculum which we suggest meets these objectives. It is presented in a worksheet format similar to that which we currently employ, and is aimed specifically for the student seeking an entry level position in corporate management.

Student's Name:_____
Student's Number:_____
Date First Completed:_____

Ohio University
School of Interpersonal Communication

THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION*

	Hours	Date Completed	Grade
A. General InCo Requirements			
1. InCo 101 or InCo 103			
2. At least five hours of English selected from the following courses: 171 A, B, C, D, E, F, or 181			
3. At least nine hours in each of two of the following groups: Humanities, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences			
B Major Area Course Requirements			
1. InCo 205 - Tech. of Group Disc.	4		
2. InCo 210 - Parliamentary Procedure	2		
3. InCo 334 - Intro. To Comm. Process	4		
4. InCo 404 - Interviewing	3		
5. InCo 442 - Communication & Persuasion	4		
6. InCo 445 - Comm. in Organizations	4		
7. InCo 446 - Comm. & the Campaign	4		
8. InCo 498 - Special Problems	4		
9. InCo Electives (16 hours minimum)			
InCo 104 - Listening	2		
InCo 405 - Prin. of Conference Ldrship.	4		
InCo 432 - Creativity in Communication	4		
InCo 448 - Cross-Cultural Comm.	4		
InCo 458 - Resp. & Freedom of Spch, Comm.	4		
InCo 497 - Internship	1-15		
10. English 308 or Management 325			
11. Psych 121 or CS 201 or InCo 269			

* Hours are in quarter units (3 quarter units = 2 semester units).

Undergraduate Major in Organizational Communication

C. Minor Areas Requirements	Hours	Date Completed	Grade
Minimum of 26 hours in each of two areas. At least 15 hours in each minor area must be numbered 200 or higher.			
1. Personnel Management			
Mgt. 200 - Intro. to Mgt.	4		
Mgt. 300 - Management	4		
Mgt. 420 - Admin. of Personnel	4		
Mgt. 426 - Manpower Management	4		
Bus. Law 356 - Law of the Mgt. Process	4		
Bus. Adm. 480 - Ethics & Morality in Bus.	4		
Psych 251 - Public Service Research	5		
2. Financial Administration			
Bus. Adm. 101 - Bus. & Its Environment	4		
Bus. Adm. 310 - Production Mgt.	4		
Acct. 101 - Managerial Accounting	4		
Econ. 101 - Principles of Econ.	4		
Econ. 213 - Current Economic Problems	4		
Fin. 325 - Managerial Finance	4		
Mkt. 301 - Marketing Principles	4		
Mkt. 444 - Consumer Behavior	4		
D. General Electives			
Total Hours (Minimum 180)			